

Iowa Wesleyan College (Mount Pleasant  
Collegiate Institute), Old Main Building  
South of Broad Street, between Main and  
Broadway Streets  
Mount Pleasant  
Henry County

HABS No. IA-59

HABS  
IOWA,  
44-MOPLA,  
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS  
IOWA,  
44-MOPLA,  
2-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
IOWA WESLEYAN COLLEGE, OLD MAIN BUILDING  
(Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute, Old Main Building) HABS No. IA-59

Location: On the Iowa Wesleyan College campus approximately 100 yards  
south of Broad Street, between Main and Broadway Street.

Mount Pleasant, Henry County, Iowa (2).

Present owner: Iowa Wesleyan College, Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

Present use: Houses the Music Department offices, classrooms, and  
practice rooms (2).

Significance: Old Main was the second building on Iowa Wesleyan College  
campus. The building design reflects the specific needs  
of the institution for classrooms, offices and a chapel.

PART 1.

HISTORY

Dates of construction:

The contract for construction of the building was  
awarded on 12 April 1854, the cornerstone was laid  
July 4, 1854, and the building was occupied in Oc-  
tober 1855 (1, p. 3).

Chronology:

1853

The Trustees of the Mount Pleasant College Institute  
secured James Harlan as president of the school, who

upon arrival initiated interest in acquiring a new college building (1. p. 2).

- May 1853 The Institute engaged Rev. Isaac F. Stewart as fund raiser "agent" for a new building (1, p. 2).
- June 1853 The Institute authorized a campaign to raise \$15,000 for a new building (1, p. 2).
- Summer 1853 Rev. Isaac F. Stewart and James Harlan canvassed the town door to door for donations for the new building (1, p. 2).
- January 1854 The building fund contained \$5000 (1, p. 3).
- 1854 Feb. 23 A building committee was formed consisting of E. B. Ogg, Wellington Bird, and J. H. Davis (1, p. 3).
- 1854 March 6 Plans were revised; the building was to be fifty-five by one hundred feet in plan and three stories high, with a cupola (6, p. 228).
- 1854 March 28 Proposals for construction of the building were advertised for. Plans and specifications could be seen to April 12 at Dr. Bird's medical offices (2; 1, p. 3).
- 1854 April 27 The construction contract was awarded to Alexander Lee for \$14,500 (1, p. 3).
- 1854 July 4 A ceremony for the laying of the cornerstone was held (1, p. 3).
- 1854 Sept. 21 A tornado hit the newly completed walls. All of the north wall down to the second story was demolished, along with joists and window frames. The northeast corner wall was cracked to the foundation, apparently

- from a bolt of lightning. The cost of the damage was estimated at \$2000 (1, p. 4).
- 1854 Oct. 2 & 3 A second windstorm tore down the east wall to the foundation and the south wall was "sprung" (1, p. 4).
- 1854 Oct. 3 The Trustees instituted the sale of scholarship bonds to raise money for repairs and completion of the building (1, p. 5).
- 1854 Oct. to 1857 Nov. Disagreement between owner and contractor on the additional costs incurred by storm damage.
- 1854 Fall College level instruction began at the Institute. Formerly it had provided only primary and secondary level education (1, pp. 2,6).
- 1855 Oct. Old Main was occupied (5; 1, p. 6).
- 1856 New fences were installed outside Old Main and a botanical garden was planted behind it. Henry Avez of Burlington gave the college a hundred maple trees (1, pp. 6-7).
- 1857 Nov. 26 Alexander Lee resigned as a member of the Board of Trustees and as Treasurer of the school as a result of disagreements about payment for his work on Old Main (1, p. 5).
- Late 1850's Maintenance problems became acute: "wall damage, leaky roof, falling plaster and endless knife cuts and pencil markings on the walls" (1, p. 7).
- 1868 The Trustees ceased selling scholarship bonds for building fund revenue (1, p. 5).

- 1866-1869 Financial settlements for building costs were completed (1, p. 7).
- January 1869 Seven women founded the PEO Sisterhood, a midwestern women's organization, in the Music Room on the second floor (1, p. 8).
- 1869-1917 The Music Room on second floor was used for college purposes. Subsequently it was in the charge of the PEO (1, pp. 8-9).
- 1870's The northeast corner of the third floor was used as a museum of natural history, and lectures were held in the chapel (1, pp. 9-11).
- 1874 A new bell was installed in the cupola of Old Main (5).
- 1875 The bell was removed from the cupola because of vibrations (5).
- 1889 The porch was added to the south side of Old Main. Later the east and west entrances were closed, permitting the addition of two small classrooms (5).
- 1890's Considerable repairs to Old Main were undertaken including installation of electric lights in the chapel (1, p. 12).
- 1891 The room on the northeast corner of the first floor was made into a library. Previously there had been no university library, since reference books were not used in instruction (1, pp. 12,13).
- 1893 Religious activities were moved from Old Main to the University Chapel and Hall of Science (1, p. 12).

IOWA WESLEYAN COLLEGE, OLD MAIN BUILDING  
(Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute, Old Main Building)  
HABS No. IA-59 (page 5)

- 1894 Art classes were held in Old Main (1, p. 12).
- 1896 June 15 A periodical room in conjunction with the library was opened in Old Main (1, p. 13).
- 1897-1902 Howe's Academy, a preparatory shcool in Mount Pleasant, used space in Old Main on a contractual basis (1, p. 12).
- 1918 The Trustees closed the Iowa Wesleyan Academy, a preparatory school, and Old Main was devoted entirely to students engaged in baccalaureate program (1, p. 14).
- 1920's-1950's Old Main remained basically the same in use and condition (1, p. 14).
- 1961 Adam Trishman Hall of Science was completed and the Old German College building demolished. There was, as a result, a major reallocation of spaces. The departments of biology, social sciences, home economics, teacher education and foreign languages moved from Old Main. The Music Department was transferred from the German College building to Old Main. Old Main was then used for art and music (1, pp. 14-15).
- 1969 Art classes in Old Main were removed and the Music Department alone occupied this building, as today (1, p. 15).
- 1973 March 26 Old Main was placed on the National Register of Historic Places (4).
- 1974-1976 Exterior renovation is planned in 1974 to include a new roof and repair of the cupola; strengthening the foundation; cleaning, tuckpointing and sealing of the brick walls; repair of window frames, wooden ornamental

features and the south entrance porch. An interior renovation is planned in 1976 which will consist of a total reconstruction of beams, floors, walls, stairways, ceilings, lighting and heating systems, with installation of fire safety requirements (4).

Architect or designer:

Unknown. The well designed system of corridors and stairways suggests that the designer was knowledgeable.

Original and subsequent names:

When Old Main was completed, it was referred to as "the main college edifice" in every catalog of Iowa Wesleyan from 1854 to 1888. New buildings erected after 1888 were given specific names. "The main college edifice" gradually developed capitalization as "Main Edifice," "Main," and finally "Old Main" (1, p. 15).

The name of the institution was changed to Iowa Wesleyan University on 15 February 1855, at James Harlan's instigation (1, p. 2; 6, p. 232). In 1911 it became Iowa Wesleyan College (7, p. 103).

Contractors and suppliers:

The contract for construction was awarded to Alexander Lee on 27 April 1854. Lee was an early settler in Mount Pleasant, having come to Iowa in 1836 from Flemingsburg, Kentucky (1, p. 3).

Benjamin Franklin Pearson of Keosauqua cut the stone for the foundation and laid the brick for the walls. He received most of his pay

in tuition redeemable scholarship bonds. Pearson was a Methodist minister who made his living in the stone and brick trades (1, p. 4).

Historical events and persons associated with the building:

In 1853...the Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute was an almost defunct, eleven-year-old primary and secondary school housed in a lone two story building now called Pioneer Hall. The Trustees of the Institute in a last ditch effort to survive called to the presidency, a thirty-three-year-old attorney and former school master, James Harlan, from Iowa City...(1, p. 2).

Harlan was born August 26, 1820, in Clark County, Illinois, and moved with his family to Indiana in 1824. He attended Asbury University (now DePauw University) in Greencastle, Indiana, and graduated in 1845. He married Ann Eliza Peck, November 9, 1845, and moved to Iowa City the same year. After serving as superintendent of public instruction in Iowa in 1847 and his admission to the bar in 1848, he practiced law in Iowa City. Harlan served twice as president of Iowa Wesleyan University, 1853-55 and 1869-70. Subsequently, he was elected three times to the United States Senate and served as Secretary of the Interior for Andrew Johnson. His daughter, Mary Eunice Harlan, married the son of Abraham Lincoln, Robert Todd Lincoln, in 1868 (3, p. 21).

Historians should long ago have wondered at what forces were responsible for the sudden friendship of Lincoln and Harlan after several years of opposition by the senator to presidential measures, particularly Reconstruction policy...The gulf between Lincoln the conservative and Harlan the radical is too great to be ignored. It seems that Robert Todd Lincoln's "love at first sight" courtship of Mary Harlan was the wedge which opened the door for a sudden friendship between the fathers of the young people. As the romance developed, the friendship between their fathers could develop (7, pp. 169,170).

James Harlan died at Mount Pleasant on October 5, 1899 (3, p. 21). When first called to the presidency of Iowa Wesleyan, he declined the position, but he accepted a second offer in 1853 on three conditions: that a collegiate curriculum had to be established, that a second



building be constructed, and that the name be changed to indicate university aspirations and the relationship to the Methodist Episcopal Church (1, p. 2).

Isaac Stewart, who has been designated "agent" fund raiser for a new building, and Harlan went from door to door to raise money for the project (1, p. 2).

A museum of natural history was begun in Old Main by John Melvil Mansfield who after 1873, developed the first true science degree curriculum at the college. The museum was improved and enlarged by Professor C. M. Grumbling and Dr. Harry E. Jaques (1, pp. 9-10).

In 1870 a law curriculum was established at Iowa Wesleyan in Old Main as the result of efforts by Henry Ambler and Washington J. Babb. One of the graduates, Belle Babb Mansfield, became the first woman in the United States to be admitted to the bar (1, p. 11).

## PART 2.

## DESCRIPTION

1. Materials of construction and system of construction: Yellow-brown brick bearing walls. Rubble stone foundation.
2. Overall dimensions: 55' x 100' (1, p. 3).
3. Number of bays: Nine at the front and rear, three at the ends.
4. Number of stories: Three.
5. Roof form: Hip roof.
6. Notable exterior features: String courses, archivolt at door and window openings, frieze (but not brackets), and corner pilasters are all formed of brickwork. These are all painted white. Old photographs show them painted darker than the brick, except that the

corner pilasters were unpainted. There is a domed cupola, appearing to be built of wood, now painted white and also appearing in old photographs painted dark.

7. Plan type: The building is a simple rectangle in plan. At the first floor there is a central corridor running the length of the building and another central corridor crossing it. The main entrance opens into the second corridor, which contains a stairway opposite the main entrance and leading to the second floor. At each end of the building, at the front, there is a stairway connecting all three floors. The second floor has a central corridor running its full length, and the third floor has one interrupted at one end.

On the main floor of "Old Main" were four large rooms of like dimensions, the southwest room was for Mathematics, the northwest the Chemical laboratory, the southeast the Physics, and the northeast was given over to the "library" and the beginnings of the museum...The office of the president was on the south side of the building, second floor, and directly over the main entrance. Directly above it on the third floor and of the same dimensions was another room but when we knew it it was not used. The chapel was the large third floor room now occupied by the Museum. In those good old days the entire building was heated by stove, wood burning and at the rear of Old Main was usually many cords of wood taken in exchange for tuition (5).

Since this time there have been rearrangements of the rooms.

8. Style: Probably best seen as a humble interpretation, in brickwork, of the Renaissance Revival, North Italian Mode, according to Marcus Whiffen's categories (8, pp. 78-82).

### PART 3.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

#### Primary or unpublished:

1. Haselmayer, Louis A. "Old Main." Pamphlet. Christmas, 1973.

2. Haselmayer, Louis A. "Old Main. National Registry of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form. 7 August 1972.
3. McMurtry, R. Gerald. "The Harlan-Lincoln Tradition at Iowa Wesleyan College." Pamphlet. Harlan-Lincoln Restoration Commission, 1959.
4. "Old Main Restoration, a Bicentennial Year Project." Leaflet. Iowa Wesleyan College, no date.
5. "A Pictorial History of Mount Pleasant. Early Picture of Old Main." Newspaper clipping in scrapbook at Iowa Wesleyan College. No source, no date, c. 1946.

Secondary or published sources:

6. Haselmayer, Louis A. "The Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute: a Struggle for Existence." Annals of Iowa, ser. 3, 39 (Winter 1968): 205-232.
7. Sage, Leland L. A History of Iowa. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1974.
8. Whiffen, Marcus. American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1969.

Credits:

Field inspection and research: John David Langholz, Teaching Assistant.  
Writing: Greg Stephen Hutchinson, Research Assistant.  
Editing: Wesley Ivan Shank, Associate Professor.

Department of Architecture

Iowa State University 1973-1974

Edited for HABS by Druscilla J. Null, Historian